DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 962 SO 021 588

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TITLE The Difficulties of Peace Education. Peace Education Miniprints No. 17.
INSTITUTION Lund Univ. (Sweden). Malmo School of Education.
REPORT NO ISSN-1101-6418
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 17p.
AVAILABLE FROM Department of Education and Psychological Research, Malmo School of Education, Box 23501, S-200 45, Malmo, Sweden.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Controversial Issues (Course Content); *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Global Approach; International Relations; Moral Issues; Role of Education; Social Change; Social Studies; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teaching Experience; Values Education; World Affairs; *World Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Peace Education

ABSTRACT

Many teachers feel uncertain when given the task of teaching peace education because of the relative novelty and controversial character of this field. This document examines some of the difficulties and obstacles involved in peace education. First, various views of society, the school, and the change process are reviewed in relation to peace education efforts. Then, more specific barriers are discussed, using examples from the Malmo School of Education project, "Preparedness for Peace." Finally, certain measures aimed at coming to terms with the difficulties are outlined. A 22-item list of references is included. (Author/DB)

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THE DIFFICULTIES OF PEACE EDUCATION

Åke Bjerstedt

Many teachers feel uncertain when faced with peace education because of the relative novelty and controversial character of this field. In this miniprint, some aspects of the difficulties and obstacles involved in peace education work are examined. First, various views of society, the school and change are touched upon in relation to peace education efforts. Then some more specific and concrete difficulties are brought up (with examples from the material of the Malmö project "Preparedness for Peace"). Finally, certain measures aimed at coming to terms with the difficulties are discussed.

Many teachers feel uncertain when faced with peace education, among other things because of the relative novelty and controversial character of this field. In our project "Preparedness for Peace" in Malmö, we have encountered this problem in various contexts (in the answers to the questionnaire distributed to different countries, in our interviews with experts, e.g. researchers, teacher trainers and teachers as well as in our own school experiments; see for example Bjerstedt, 1988b, 1990; Bjerstedt, Hellenberg & Lehmann, 1990; Collinson, Masheder, Sewell, White & The Project, 1990).

In what follows, some aspects of the difficulties and obstacles involved in peace education work will be examined. First I shall discuss views of society, the school and change in relation to the peace education of the school in more general terms. Then I shall bring up some more specific and concrete difficulties in our work (with examples from the material of the project). Finally, certain measures aimed at coming to terms with the difficulties will be discussed.

Views of society, the school and change

Reflections on various ways of looking at society, the school and change may contribute to shedding light on the reactions that peace-oriented school work often gives rise to.

Society can, for example, be viewed from different perspectives of time. We have society as it is *now* (Sn); society as it used to be, in a *historical* perspective (Sh); and society as it will be in the *future* (Sf). Naturally, society in a historical perspective is not a uniform concept, but a collective term for a series of different societies: Sh1, Sh2 etc.

Of course we never have absolute and direct access to "Society" in all its relevant details. Instead, we have created notions, or *cognitive pictures*, of it that are characterised by many distortions and simplifications.

Every individual has his or her cognitive picture of today's society (CSn) as well as his or her notion of society in a historical perspective (CSh), which tends to be fairly lacking in details and quite distorted. In addition, every one of us has a certain, albeit relatively vague, picture of society in the future (CSf).

As far as our notions of the future are concerned, it may often be fruitful to sift out two different types of cognitive pictures. Thus we can talk about

"the anticipated future" (aCSf), where we create a picture of what we think will actually happen; and we can use the expression "the desired future" (dCSf) when we create a cognitive picture of what we would like the future to be like (positive vision).

Many people think that the role or task of school should mainly be that of "reproducing", i.e. school is primarily considered to be a tool for recreating the present societal conditions (pass on the tradition). In that way it contributes to considerable similarities in society at various points in time: Sh1 = Sh2 = Sn = Sf.

Some of those people who think that this is how school functions consider this to be a desirable state of affairs. We can call them "traditionalists" (or say that they represent "Norm T"). The following equivalence then applies to them: dCSf = CSn.

Another group consider it undesirable (dCSf ≠ CSn) but feel that the reproductive forces of society are so powerful that school is forced to "follow" and really cannot bring about any change. Maybe we can call this group "progressive school pessimists" (or say that they represent "Norm PP").

There is, on the other hand, a third group that think that school has a certain potential for being one of the forces heading for a different society, one that is more like dCSf. Hence school may be regarded as one of the tools in our work to bring about value-oriented societal change.

As we have found fit to emphasize in various contexts, peace-oriented education may imply different things (see e.g. Bjerstedt, 1989). But in many cases it seems accurate to say that the "peace educator" departs from an explicit or implicit assumption, that a certain amount of societal change through school towards a future society more in accordance with a positive vision is desirable as well as possible. The tool needed here is to make our pupils better able to form society in a desirable way: we give them a different and better "preparedness for the future", we reinforce certain desirable "value perspectives" and "action preparedness" etc. In that case, peace educators may be classified as "progressive school optimists" (or be said to represent "Norm PO").

This particular view can easily lead to attacks, both from the group of "traditionalists" and that of "progressive school pessimists".

Obviously all this is quite schematic and abstract; but maybe this special situation of the peace educator can partly explain the "normative draught" that he or she so often experiences. There are, so to speak, snorts from the

right wing as well as from part of the left wing, which has been proved by the press debate in Sweden concerning the start-up activities of the Swedish National Board of Education in this area.

The resistance tends to be particularly pronounced since the part of society that is affected, directly or indirectly (i.e. "the defense"), is emotionally charged as a security symbol and periodically almost taboo, even in the general political debate.

Examples of difficulties and obstacles in the peace-oriented work of school

In this section I shall discuss some more concrete phenomena that may create difficulties and obstacles in peace education work. I am referring to phenomena that occur at quite different levels but that are partly interconnected. (Cf. Box 1 with some examples of interview answers from peace educators on the difficulties of peace education.)

The international political tradition of heavily armed nations, and their armament backed by a military and economic establishment, is of course a powerful counterforce to be taken into account. The representatives of this tradition and these interests have great resources at their disposal in order to influence public opinion in a direction opposite from the one that "disarmament education" is working for. It easily turns into a "David against Goliath" situation. To a large extent, the political tradition is also marked by a nationalistic perspective, and shifting over to a global perspective is no minor change; this is something that Robert Muller, the UN official, emphasized in his answers when he was interviewed in our project (Muller & The Project, 1988).

The stereotyped thinking of the debate in the mass media. That a certain political tradition exists is one thing, but what is regrettable is that this tradition has more or less become regarded as a "natural condition" which it is not humanly possible to change. Here the stereotyped thinking of the debate in the mass media is important. A lot is said about adapting to "reality", "the requirements of security" etc, whereas comparatively little energy is devoted to a critical analysis of this tradition and these requirements and to a discussion of alternative solutions. It is often built into the stereotyped language that discussions of these issues are couched in, as a self-evident assumption, that "a high level of armament" = "security" (see

Box 1. Some examples of interview answers to a question on the difficulties of peace education

Question:
In many countries, questions related to disarmament and peace are highly controversial. Would you anticipate any difficulties, for example with parents or other members of the community, when introducing peace education in schools? If so, what kind of difficulties? Do you see any way out of such problems?

Answer by Henk B. Gerritsma, The Polemological Institute, Groningen, The Netherlands (Gerritsma, Verbaan & The Project, 1991):
Education on political conflicts and problems is controversial in different ways. First of all until the mid-eighties, peace education was confronted with mistrust of its objectives; especially with regard to themes like security policy. This was inspired by the fear of partiality, one-sided information and hidden objectives. It had to do with fixed political opinions, and it was also related to the predominant view that education should be neutral. We have responded to this problem in several ways: a) By explaining very clearly our concept as well as our objectives of peace education. b) By elaborating the teaching materials in cooperation with teachers/schools; those materials were first reviewed by the educational authorities and tested in a number of schools, and only then were they published and distributed. c) By providing well-balanced and comprehensive information, and by presenting different opinions and interpretations. d) By creating conditions, by means of a didactic method, for an open process of opinion formation, with the emphasis on the pupils' own reasoned choices. We did not say that peace education is neutral, because it is biased, like the teaching of all social subjects.

Other criticism is related to the fear that pupils will feel helpless and pessimistic if confronted with threatening political conflicts and problems. The question is raised whether it is pedagogically justifiable to deal with these conflicts and problems in the classroom. We have taken these apprehensions into account by emphasizing (a) clarifying analysis, and not terrifying information, (b) the possibilities of and proposals for peaceful control, conflict resolution and reduction, and the attempts made to realize these.

Another difficulty in this connection has been the limited interest and involvement of adolescents in politics. We have taken this into account: a) by attempting to translate these problems into the world of the pupils as much as possible, in close cooperation with teachers, b) by emphasizing a pupil-directed didactic method,

which appeals to their personal activity and involvement.

In our work we have been confronted with *two other restrictions*. On the one hand, there is the problem that an adequate handling of political conflicts and problems places high demands upon teachers. Experience has proved that they need substantial didactic training and support, especially because these issues received relatively little attention in teacher training until the late seventies. On the other hand, there is little or no room for peace education as a new subject, and the possibilities of the curricula of the school subjects to deal with questions of political conflicts and problems are limited. Hence, peace education should not be propagated as a new subject, but the objectives should be integrated in the existing curricula and textbooks.

Answer by Tom Roderick, Educators for Social Responsibility, New York, USA (Roderick & The Project, 1990):
I do see difficulties. I think that if it is done in certain ways it's going to alienate people. For instance, if you start introducing nuclear issues in a way that terrifies kids - that's going to upset people. If you put forth certain solutions without looking at them from various points of view, you run into problems. Sometimes, when a city is mainly populated by military personnel, nearby a military base for example, even to start raising the questions causes problems. But for the most part, I think it's the way that's it's done rather than the content.

Our idea of conflict resolution is that you can deal with conflict in a way that respects people. That approach can apply to controversial issues. You need to introduce such issues in a very careful and sensitive way, and to begin where your constituency is. In New York, we asked the teachers what area they wanted to work with. They were concerned about inter-personal conflict in their classrooms primarily, so that's where we started, but then we can build on that and proceed to other areas.

I think it's very important when you introduce these issues that you avoid pushing any one solution or any narrow political agenda. It has to be a real solid educational process with a long-range perspective. There's that slogan: If you can change my mind completely to go to your point of view today, then someone else can come along tomorrow, and I'll go off in the other direction. What we want to develop is first: people who care about what's going on in the world, and second: people who are able to think about it in a constructive and thorough way, so that they make up their own minds. I think that if that's what you're really doing - then, in most places you won't run into too much trouble; and if you do, then at least you're having an honest fight: you aren't vulnerable in a moral or educational sense.

e.g. Kelman & The Project, 1988).

Anxiety as an obstacle to new solutions. Many people are worried about current developments. Anxiety creates a non-creative climate of thought. We cling to old solutions, even though we do not really believe in them, not daring to try out new strategies. We are afraid of the unknown; we are afraid of unpleasant economic consequences; and it may feel good for us to focus our anxiety by associating it with notions of someone who can be experienced as "the enemy". Then, of course, a change of what is seen as the equivalent of "security" (i.e. the level of armament) may give rise to particular anxiety.

The conditions mentioned so far may be said to be *general forces in society*, which make those who want to promote peace education at school feel that they are fighting an uphill battle. If we consider *difficulties and obstacles more directly associated with the school situation*, a few additional factors may be mentioned.

The "intellectualist tradition" in research and education. There is a strong tradition of concentrating on "facts", "knowledge", "matter-of-factness" and "objectivity" in research and education at various levels. We should not let value judgements influence our search for knowledge in a misleading way. We should allow free scope for many voices rather than indoctrinating. In many ways, this tradition has been valuable in creating watchfulness against biased proselytizers and propagandists of various hues. On the other hand, this tradition has also occasionally led to a rigid repudiation of all kinds of value-related influences, especially those which deviate from the traditional, institutionalised ones. This theme is often discussed in our interviews with experts and is reflected in, for example, the titles of our miniprints "Is it right for a teacher to be biased - towards avoidance of violence and environmental damage?" (Smoker & The Project, 1990) and "Education for peace as liberation vs. indoctrination: Do we, in fact, need some 'unbalanced teaching' to achieve a 'balanced learning'?" (Lipkin, Yarwood & The Project, 1990). It is also touched upon in the discussion between Kjell Goldmann, the expert on political science, and Bengt Thelin, the advocate of education for peace (Goldmann & Thelin, 1990).

Resistance from local or central school authorities. In Sweden, the central school authority - the Swedish National Board of Education - has sided with the pedagogical peace workers by means of various kinds of central recommendations, which has contributed to legitimizing education for peace; the same applies to Finland, for example. In some countries, there is

a lack of a corresponding pronounced support by the authorities (in Denmark, for example). In other countries, there are several examples of negative attitudes on the part of the authorities, at least within certain parts of the school system (in Great Britain, for example). In other words, the current situation varies considerably from one part of the world to another, which is also evident in our interviews with experts (cf for example Baltzersen, Pøhler & Projektet, 1987; Burns, Wahlström & The Project, 1988; Collinson, Masheder, Sewell, White & The Project, 1990).

Resistance from parents. Several interview answers display resistance on the part of parents. The most common motivations are that the children may experience education for peace as frightening (for example when the consequences of nuclear war are discussed) and that peace education work is characterised by political indoctrination towards radical pacifism. Parental resistance is often based on a lack of knowledge of what education for peace really implies and what is prescribed in school curricula in general. Resistance is often offered by parents who are associated with the military system (cf Brock-Utne's discussion of "political mathematics"; Brock-Utne & Projektet, 1988).

Resistance from colleagues. Teachers who have been pioneers in education for peace have often come under suspicion in one way or another. The two most common methods are calling those who work along those lines "naive" ("blue-eyed", "unrealistic" etc.) or "politically unreliable". In the U.S., the stamp of "communist" has frequently been used (Elise Boulding: "I am very conscious of the people who are seeing a communist under every bed or behind every bush"; Boulding & The Project, 1991); the corresponding association with "leftist extremism" may be encountered elsewhere as well. Nowadays, this way of casting suspicion on colleagues has probably become less frequent in our country. Instead, teachers may take the attitude that education for peace is too emotional and "wishy-washy" and that peace projects take too much time from the more "solid" teaching that is focused on the basic skills.

Lack of training. Teachers who would like to get involved in education for peace may of course feel that they lack the knowledge necessary to work in this area. Normally, little interest has been devoted to these issues in their training, and the possibilities of further education are usually very limited. This lack of education and experience can be a great obstacle, especially since the field is often regarded as being emotionally sensitive and controversial. (Cf Bjerstedt, 1988a; Bjerstedt, Hellenberg & Lehmann, 1990.)

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School structure as an obstacle. Peace issues are markedly interdisciplinary, and student-run, interdisciplinary projects play an important part in an ambitious education for peace. The traditional character of school work (with fixed boundaries between the various subjects, written tests and continuous grading) may be experienced as an obstructive straitjacket in such work (cf the interview with Ingemar Gustafsson in Gustafsson et al, 1987).

Lack of knowledge. Could it be that it is not only the individual teacher who feels that he or she lacks knowledge, but that, on the whole, we know too little about the best ways of educating for peace in different subjects and at different levels?

A few comments on the difficulties

It is probably important for teachers who want to get engaged in peace-oriented education to be conscious of the existence of difficulties of the kind that have been discussed here and that may come up in various contexts. Being aware of the difficulties makes us better equipped to encounter them.

There is nothing much the teacher can do about the international political tradition. There is, however, a pedagogical task that some of our peace-oriented teachers might take on outside school, i.e. attempting to curtail the stereotyped thinking concerning these issues in the general debate by writing to the newspapers, criticising the biased arguments and pointing out the need for alternative solutions.

As far as the potential resistance from parents is concerned, it is a good rule to try to prevent unnecessary misunderstandings about intentions and methods by informing the group of parents in advance and trying to enlist them as collaborators (instead of having them as opponents) in the peace work. In doing that, teachers carry out a useful pedagogical task *per se*, and it is usually not very difficult to achieve. Cooperation with parents is touched upon in several of our interviews (see e.g. Baltzersen, Brock-Utne, Burns, Sødring Jensen, Nielsen in the compilation Bjerstedt, 1990).

Genuine peace education is based on mutual communication, on a dialogue. This applies to the internal school work (cf Haavelsrud & Projektet, 1988), but it also applies to teachers' contacts with adults outside school. In this context, it may be worth calling attention to Elise Boulding's

description of "Project Listen" in the U.S., where exhaustive conversations with opponents are conducted, emphasising the importance of deeper understanding rather than trying to score points in a simple confrontation. It is not a quick and uncomplicated method, but in the long run it may prove to be of great importance. (Cf Boulding & The Project, 1991.)

As for resistance from colleagues, an open discussion is likely to be the best counter-method. It is also important for us to try to find allies among our colleagues, even before work is initiated. Two or more people do a better job planning something, and in addition, they can give each other psychological support.

Here it may also be justified to emphasize that peace-oriented education is a many-faceted task encompassing many different sub-goals and many different methods. As a matter of fact, large parts of this work tend to be quite uncontroversial, for example providing the pupils with knowledge of actual conditions, or teaching them to give priority to non-violent solutions when dealing with personal conflicts. As long as teachers work with such parts of education for peace, hardly anybody is likely to object.

But when we approach what UNESCO calls "disarmament education" more directly, the topic may be experienced as being delicate and controversial, i.e. when the value of military armament is questioned and violent solutions in the international arena are discussed. It should be of great help to the teachers involved if they discuss and decide *what* they want to take up and *how*.

We might also consider what terminology to use in dealing with such issues at school. Several of our interviewees discuss this, pointing out that words like "peace" and "peace education" often give rise to opposition, while the same phenomena can easily be discussed under other labels. Jan Øberg, says that "the word peace . . . arouses strange feelings" (Jensen, Øberg & Projektet, 1987). Some of the people we interviewed feel that the cause is the important thing, and that sometimes it may be wise to restrict oneself to a cautious terminology, while there are others who think that the pedagogical task should also include the creation of positive associations to the word "peace" (e.g. Ian Harris; see Harris, Young & The Project, 1989). Personally I think there is a lot to Ian Harris' opinions on this issue.

The most alarming problem for some time has been the absurdly high degree of armament with super weapons - including the risk of using them by mistake. It should be comparatively easy to make many people accept that this is an undesirable situation which does not contribute to global security.

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If we primarily concentrate on such issues, and if we allow all various kinds of opinions to be expressed when sensitive topics are discussed, it should be easier to make the general public accept this type of education.

It may also be important to clarify that the goal is "real security". What is now often called "security" (i.e. a high degree of armament) is largely a "pseudo-security", and we must find "alternative forms of security" characterised by a lesser risk of death and destruction. In this context, some people prefer to talk about "rearmament" rather than "disarmament". It should also be emphasized that today's world is different from that of the past. We now live in a world of strong mutual dependence, and there are many mutual problems that we have to solve. The narrow national perspective of yesterday does not work any longer. (Cf e.g. G.F. Mische in Bents et al, 1989.)

Should we then be allowed to go ahead at school and discuss the defense of our country and its military policy? Should - for example - the Swedish school be allowed to question Swedish export of weapons? Should we allow critical opinions on the degree of Swedish armament? May we discuss alternative ways of protecting our country? Should we also allow pacifist arguments and arguments for non-combatant military service?

There are different opinions. My own answer is: Yes, we *may* and *should* take up those issues. In an open, democratic society, all essential societal issues should be discussed at school. Our highschool students - who are greatly affected by these issues - should be made to listen to arguments from people with different attitudes. Teachers should be allowed to state their opinions openly, whether they happen to be in favour of the traditional defense, or pacifist, or ambivalent.

A German-language policy statement (from the Minister of Culture of Hesse) says, among other things, that peace education should be connected with the general task of school of making the pupils active and democratic citizens who can participate actively and critically in "Mitgestaltung der Friedenspolitik". Such a goal requires access to relevant arguments. (Cf Bjerstedt, 1988b.)

But teachers should, of course, also be prepared for the fact that such open discussions do not appeal to everybody, and it is wise, if possible, to try to win the support of parents, colleagues and school administrators in advance, when a major educational project involving such controversial issues is being planned.

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"Peace Education Miniprints" are published and distributed by the R&D Group "Preparedness for Peace" (address: School of Education, Box 23501, S-200 45 Malmö, Sweden).

At present "Peace Education Miniprints" will also function as aids in the networking activities of PEC/IPRA (the Peace Education Commission of the International Peace Research Association).

ISSN 1101-6418

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